



AMERICAN HUMANE

Protecting Children & Animals Since 1877

February 10, 2010

Representative Mark Meadows
House Judiciary Committee
Lansing, MI 48909-7514

Dear Chairman Meadows:

On behalf of American Humane, the Nation's only non-profit dedicated to protecting both children and animals from harm, thank you for hearing HB 5655 and HB 5656 in the House Judiciary Committee on February 12. We believe these are two important bills that will greatly assist law enforcement in investigating and prosecuting animal fighting and baiting.

By allowing both real and personal property directly acquired through animal fighting or baiting to be forfeited to the state and/or local government agency where the crime occurred (HB 5655) and adding animal fighting and baiting as qualifying offenses under Michigan's Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organization Act (HB 5656), these bills send a strong message of zero tolerance for these severely inhumane practices.

Since animal fighting and baiting is a serious criminal enterprise that is closely connected to a host of other crimes that qualify under the RICO law, including illegal drug and weapons violations, gambling, aggravated assaults and gang violence, adding it to RICO is a strong way to enable law enforcement to investigate. This addition gives prosecutors the option of adding a charge of racketeering to a charge of animal fighting.

Passage of HB 5655 and 5656 is critical toward improving the welfare of both humans and animals. Many communities have been morally, socially, and culturally scarred by the continuing presence of animal fighting and baiting. Children who are exposed to the unfathomable violence involved are conditioned to believe that violence is normal and are systematically desensitized.

For the sake of human profit and entertainment, animals (primarily dogs) are beaten, chained, fed gun powder, and illegal drugs. Adding to the horror is the fact that "bait" animals—kittens, puppies, rabbits, and other small animals—are often used to test a dog's fighting instinct, and these animals are often mauled or killed in the process. Many "bait" animals are stolen pets or are acquired from shelters or "free to good home" advertisements. In the end, those that do not win are either killed or left to die horrifically painful deaths.

In addition to the toll that animal fighting and baiting takes on our animal populations, American Humane is concerned about the long-term ramifications that animal fights pose for children who observe these crimes. Law enforcement officers and prosecuting attorneys have repeatedly testified that the offenders operating these events, and the spectators attending, often bring their children along with them, treating dog-fighting as though they were normal family outings.

Children who are exposed to animal fighting/baiting are taught that the suffering and death of animals are acceptable forms of entertainment. The children who witness these events deal with the psychological effects for the rest of their lives. These impressionable children are affected in ways that are dangerous not only for them, but also their families and all of society. Psychologists have repeatedly found that children who witness such brutal behavior become desensitized to violence and its consequences. When children are taught that cruelty to animals is fun and humorous, rather than a serious crime, they are more likely to exhibit cruelty themselves. This, in turn, is an indicator of a future inclination towards violence towards other people, as well as other anti-social behaviors such as crime, drug and alcohol abuse, and mental health problems.

HB 5655 and HB 5656 make a solid statement that Michigan will not tolerate animal fighting and baiting and that the state is committed toward investigating and prosecuting these crimes.

Please vote to pass HB 5655 and HB5656. Thank you.

Sincerely,

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